

2. Cycling in the Pandemic, its Impact on Coronavirus: Survey

Kanishka Poddar, Bicycle Mayor of Ranchi, Jharkhand. email: kanishka.poddar@gmail.com

Introduction

Even though most Indian cities are not bicycle-friendly, there has been a sharp increase in recreational cycling during the pandemic as people try to beat cabin fever during lockdowns, exercise, and avoid commuting on overburdened public transport.

While the Coronavirus pandemic continues to spread, people across the globe took to cycling as it constitutes as Covid appropriate behavior. This increase in cycling's popularity has been visible across India as more cyclists are seen on the roads than before. Even as per a recent report by CRISIL the Indian Bicycle Industry is on a decadal high of 20%.

Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India even quoted in its advisory that the pandemic has presented an opportunity to make cities more accessible to pedestrians and cyclists. It went further ahead and launched two challenges – Cycle for Change and Streets for People to make our cities more cycling and pedestrian-friendly.

Even during the first wave of CoVID-19 spread in 2020, cycling turned out to be one of the best modes to commute and for fitness. The World Health Organization recommends the use of bicycles to commute as it ensures social distancing and helps us keep the coronavirus at bay.

The WHO report states:

- Better bicycle accessibility can support economic recovery after COVID-19.
- Bicycling can improve public health and quality of life.
- Cycling helps in staying mentally strong and improves the immune systems of individuals.
- Bicycling infrastructure can help cities become more resilient to future shocks.
- Cycling allows social distancing against public transports.

In order to understand the impact of cycling on coronavirus, I conducted a survey, as the Bicycle Mayor of Ranchi, India. 367 people participated in the survey. In the survey, varied questions relating to the subject were put to the participants and the result has been very insightful.

Sample Age

Interestingly only 6.3% of people under the age of 18 are currently involved in cycling activities. The majority of people involved in cycling activities are above the age of 25 who are either cycling for recreational/fitness purposes or to commute.

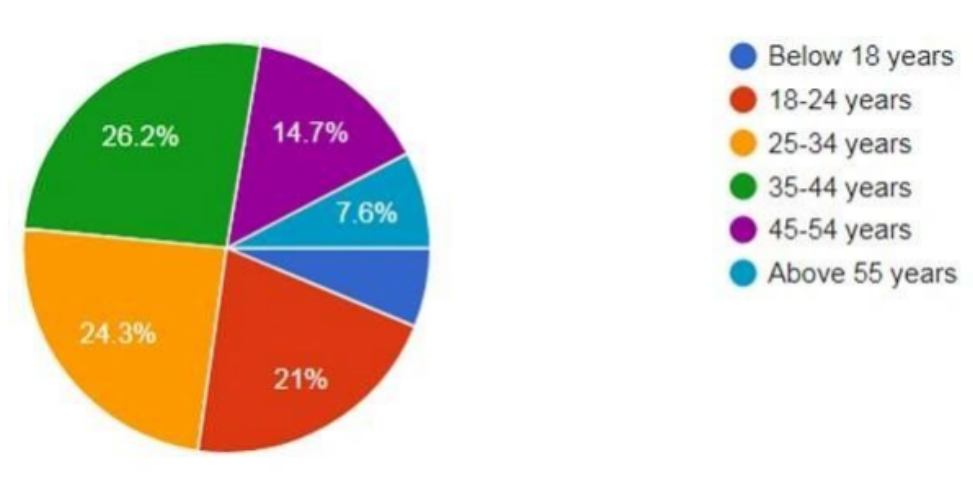


Figure 1: Age

Women in Cycling

There is still a huge gap between the numbers of men vs. the number of women in cycling. Over 91% of cyclists of the participants were men whereas only 8% are women. I have witnessed the disparity even on roads and in cycling clubs across India.

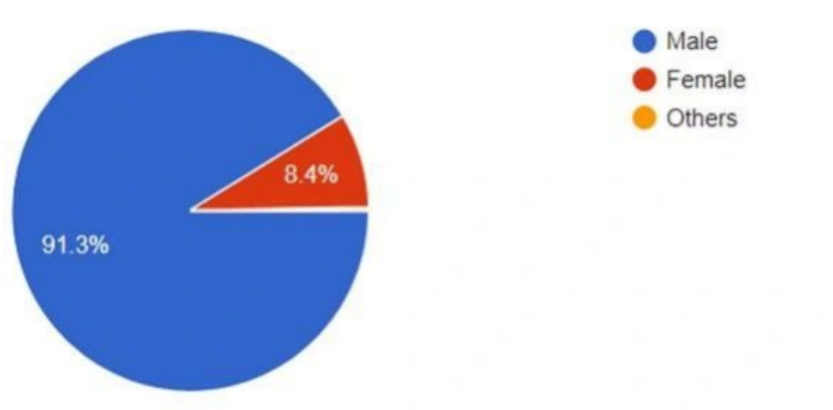


Figure 2 : Gender

Frequency of Cycling

26% of Cyclists ride daily whereas 44% of cyclists ride for 5 days or more in a week. There is only 21 percent of cyclists who ride for only 1-2 days for recreational purposes over the weekend.

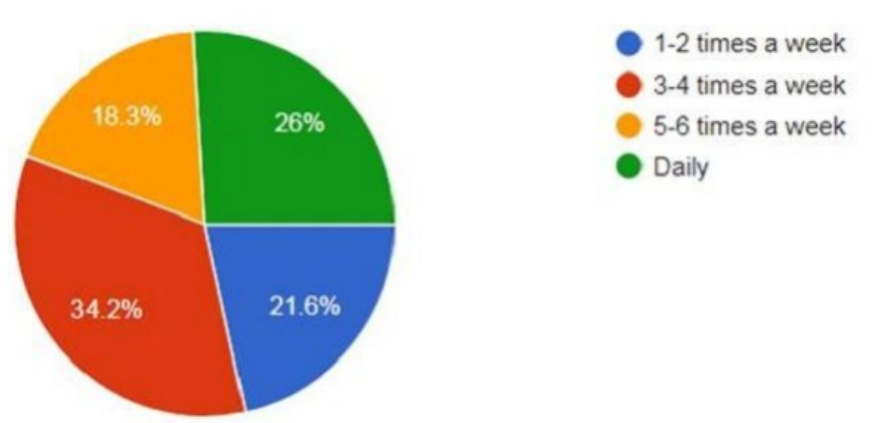


Figure 3: Frequency of cycling

Since how long one has been cycling

The covid-19 pandemic resulted in 25% growth in cycling activities which transformed into regular cycling over the period. The veterans continued to ride regularly throughout the pandemic.

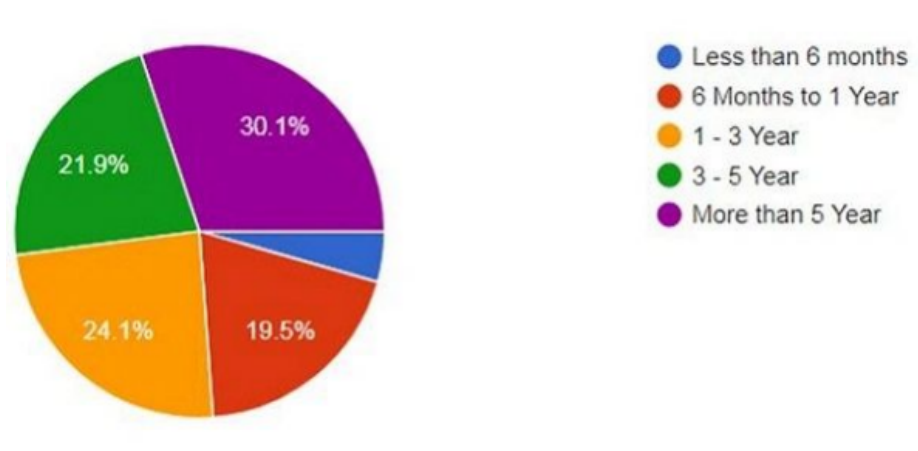


Figure 4: Since how long one has been cycling?

How many got infected?

Out of 367 cyclists who participated in the survey, 24.5% got infected by the Covid-19 virus whereas over 75% stayed negative even though they continued cycling during the lockdown. The data of the 90 people who contracted covid has been further analyzed to understand more about covid infection in cyclists.

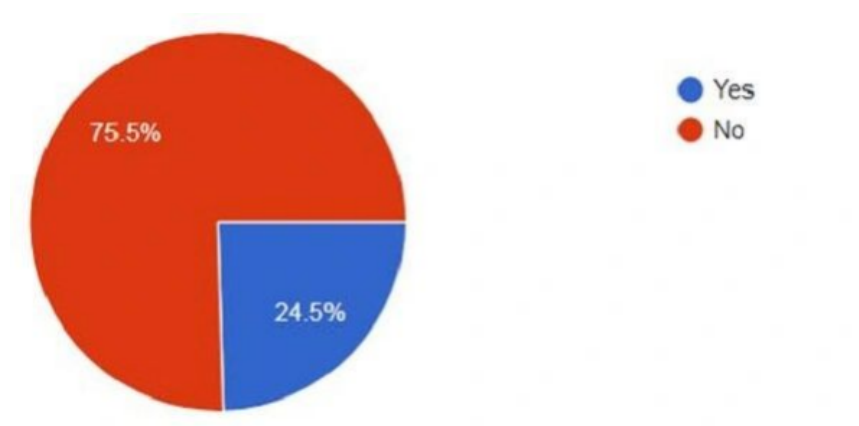


Figure 5: Were you infected by the CoVID-19 Virus?

The severity of infection

Interestingly out of the 90 covid infected people who participated in the survey, only 4 people got a severe infection and had to be kept in ICU. That is just over 1% of the total survey size. Out of 24.5%

(90 people) who got infected by a virus, 98% had a mild or moderate infection and stayed out of danger. They all stated that cycling helped them with stronger lungs which helped them a lot in recovery.

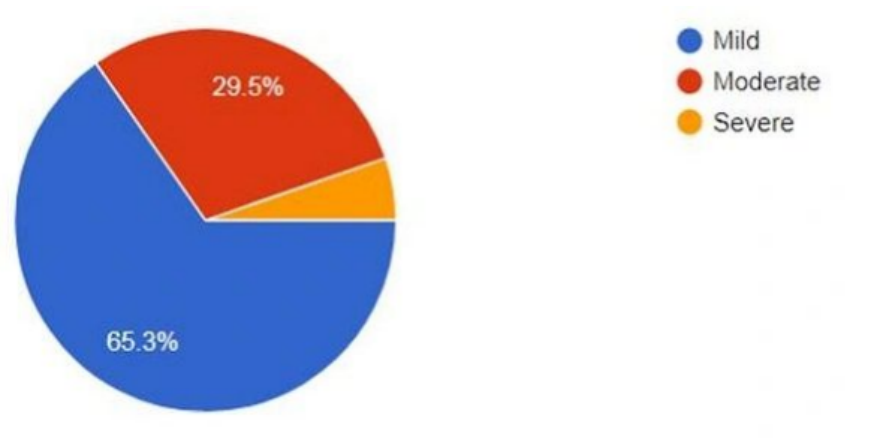


Figure 6: What was the severity of infection?

Recovery Time

Importantly, out of 90 people who got infected by a virus, over 60% recovered under 10 days while 85% recovered under 15 days.

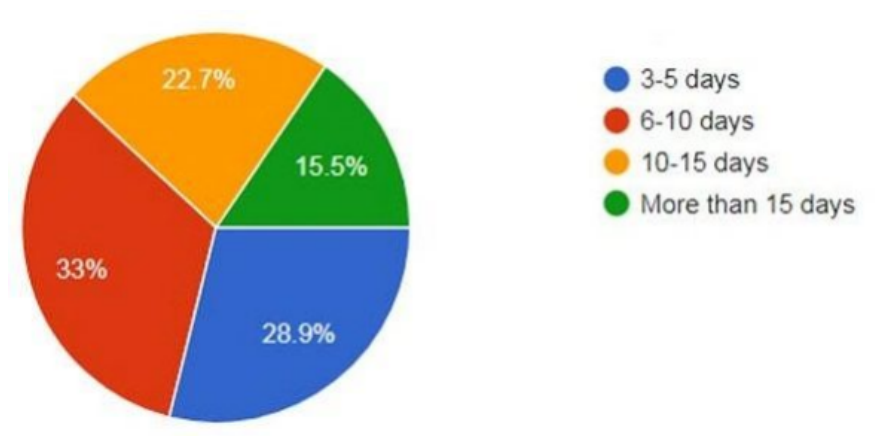


Figure 7: Recovery time

Hospitalization

Only 9% needed to be hospitalized out of total infected whereas only 4 people were admitted to ICU and had a critical level of infection.

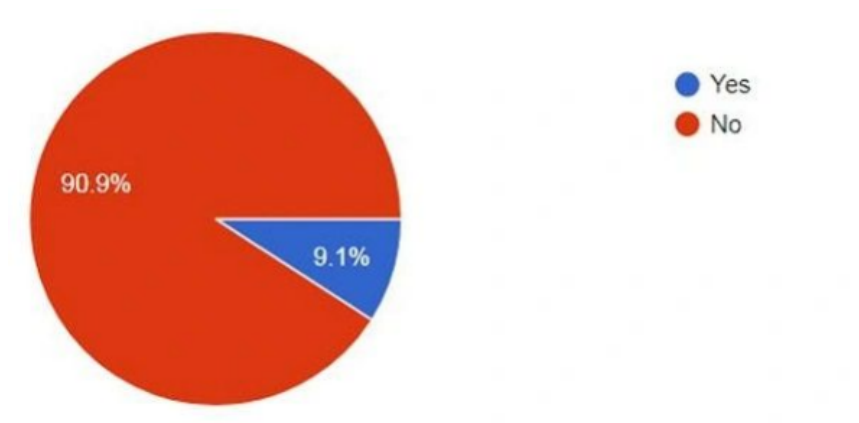


Figure 8: Hospitalization

Post recovery Problems

Out of total recovered – 87% of people didn't have any post-recovery problem, while 13% had mild issues with recovery. These 13% (12 people out of 367 cyclists) took more than 15 days to recover and were also unable to start riding for a month.

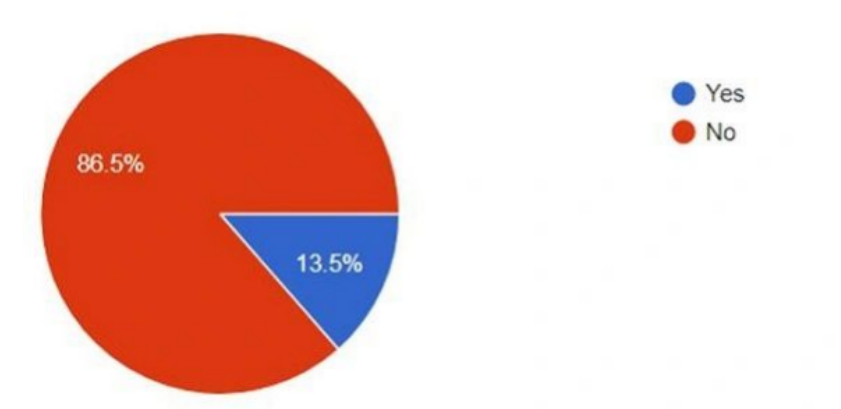


Figure 9: Post recovery problem

Time to get back on the saddle

Over 55% of people who got infected were able to recover and start cycling right after their recovery as they had a mild or very moderate level of infection. Only 20% of the cyclist took more than 30 days to get back on the saddle.

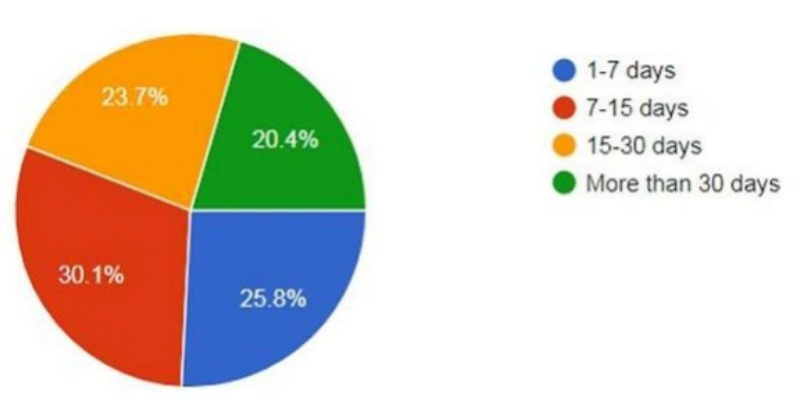


Figure 10: How long it took to get back on saddle

Conclusion

Only 1 % cyclist in the sample size was severely infected by coronavirus whereas over 98% of cyclists had mild to moderate level of infection. Cyclist feels that cycling in outdoor helps with better and stronger lungs, improves the body's immune system and keeps an individual physically and mentally fit.

Over 96% of cyclists recommended others to ride a bicycle during coronavirus to stay fit and keep the infection at bay.

Benefit of cycling

Better Health & Fitness: Cycling is an easy, convenient way to fit exercise into your daily life. It not only helps you reduce those extra kilos that you have gained while working from home but also make you for vigilant, sharp and fitter mentally. It makes you more observant. The exercise that cycling provides – whether you're riding for exercise or to make an essential journey – is good for you. It improves cardiovascular health, lowers blood pressure, and helps keep your weight under

control. Cycling can even boost your immune system. But did you know cycling to work can cut the likelihood of developing cancer or heart disease by almost half?

Better Mental Health: One in four of us experience a mental health problem in any given year as per WHO and this year it could well be higher due to pandemic. Anxiety, fear, a feeling of not being in control – these are normal responses to a pandemic. For some people, the pandemic will be a tipping point: they'll experience clinical anxiety or depression for the first time; or conditions that they already have will become unmanageable. Cycling can definitely help in making you mentally fitter and ready to sail through these times. Cycling is good for our mental well-being and is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups and it can improve mental health.

Cycling helps us with better sleep, better state of mind, reduces risk of depression and improves self-esteem and makes us happier as it releases endorphin.

Save Money: A bicycle cost less than a mobile phone and can last for decades with you. It is made with only 5% of material and energy used in making a car. It runs on your pedal power unlike other motorized vehicle which needs gas. It helps you save huge chunk of money that you invest in buying a car, refueling it with petrol month after month and spending on its maintenance. It helps you further save on medical expenses as while cycling regularly you instantly get fitter both physically and mentally reducing various illness.

Benefits of Cycle to Work to an Organization (Employer): The organization which focuses on bicycle to work for its employees gets benefited multi-fold over the period. Some of the benefits that they attract are boost in employees' productivity, reduction in sick leave, employees are more punctual in their attendance and it is best way to embrace happier and healthier workforce. These simple benefits not only increase the overall productivity of the organization but also help in getting a more sustainable outlook to an organization. Cycling to work is eco-friendly and keeps the organization's carbon footprint low. By fulfilling the corporate social responsibility, organization benefits with a positive public perception.

Reduce Traffic & Pollution: One car on the road takes a space of anything between 3-4 bicycles. Twenty bicycles can be parked in the space used by one car. These numbers are good enough to imply how traffic congestion in a city can be reduced simply by taking up cycling. The lock-down had been



a beautiful example for all of us on how with no cars on the streets our city felt more breathable and livable. It is an important reminder that bicycle produces zero pollution unlike any other motorized vehicle. It even makes individual more observant and caring towards the nature and environment.